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ABSTRACT

This newsletter includes six articles that examine key issues facing public schools and communities related to accountability, bilingual education, immigrant education, school finance, and school choice. In addressing these issues, articles focus on the importance of community involvement and input in local school reform efforts aimed at achieving educational equity. "Public Engagement Results in Support of Education for All Children" (Albert Cortez, Anna Alicia Romero) discusses how activism influenced the national debate about immigrant student access to education. "Bilingual Education Is about Bridging and Building" (Maria Robledo Montecel) offers strategies through which bilingual teachers can help children "bridge" from their native language to English while building on their strengths. "Obstacles to Immigrant Parent Participation in Schools" (Pam McCollum) identifies obstacles that discourage involvement in schools by immigrant parents and those from diverse cultural backgrounds, explores how parents' ways of interacting with schools are often misinterpreted, and offers strategies for promoting parent involvement. "What is Science Literacy?" (Joseph Vigil) stresses the importance of science educators providing students with hands-on activities, real-world experiences, and opportunities for using technology. "Top 10 Questions Parents Should Ask about Bilingual Education at Their Child's Campus" (Abelardo Villarreal, Adela Solis) overviews questions that parents should ask regarding the quality of bilingual education programs in Texas. "Public School Choice: Keeping the Focus on Equity" (Ann Bastian) explains how school choice plans can lead to educational inequality. The newsletter also includes a commentary by William S. White on the elements of a civil and democratic society. (LP)

INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXIII, No. 10 Nov./Dec. 1996

IDRA Focus:
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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXIII, No. 10 Nov./Dec. 1996

Public Engagement Results in Support of Education for All Children

Albert Cortez, Ph.D. and Anna Alicia Romero

IDRA is an independent nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving educational opportunity. Through research, materials development, training, technical assistance, evaluation, and information dissemination, we're helping to create schools that work for all children.

U.S. lawmakers recently waged a major battle over reforms of our national immigration policies. As a result of extensive pressure from California legislators, part of the national debate focused on immigrant student access to public education. This article provides an overview of the debates and the outcome for immigrant children.

The Education of Some Children is Threatened

Back in November 1994 California voters passed Proposition 187, making undocumented immigrants ineligible for public services in that state. Policy leaders in the U.S. Congress saw this as a signal to propose restrictive laws against immigrants. Several bills affecting immigrants were making their way through the legislative process rather unsuccessfully. One such bill was introduced by Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.) that would give states the option of denying children of undocumented workers access to public schools and would call for citizen verification of students' immigration status by school employees.

The Gallegly bill was postured as a "dis-incentive" for immigrants and their families to enter the country. The California legislator's intent was to allow California – which has the greatest number of immigrant student enrollees within its schools – to legally deny admission to immigrant students residing in that state.

Opponents of the measure cited the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plyler vs. Doe* in which the court had ruled that such exclusion violates the equal protection provisions of the U.S. Constitution. Analysts concur that the Gallegly proposal was designed to force a re-visiting of the *Plyler* decision in a court that many perceive is a conservative body, in hopes that the court would revise its position on the issue.

The debates about the education of children of undocumented workers were long and harsh. They caused some bitter divisions between members who are often aligned on other issues.

In Texas, Gov. George W. Bush Jr. spoke out against the measure by Gallegly because of the aftermath that would occur in Texas economically. Minority, religious and business groups also voiced strong opposition to the proposed measure on the basis of its immorality and the hurtful repercussions to the nation's economy.

Last March, in an unprecedented move, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich endorsed the amendment and strongly urged members of Congress to do the same. The national effort to curtail the number of undocumented workers in the United States was an issue couched in the argument that individual states have the right to determine how to control their borders and that immigrants are continually "reaping the benefits" of social programs for which taxpaying citizens must pay.

However, various groups spoke out against these claims and called attention to the measure's long-term negative implications. Advocacy groups throughout the country like the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE) and many others began a campaign to

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The Intercultural Development Research Association *(IDRA)* is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity. The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, copyright © 1996) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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Popularized in the early 1970s by author Thomas Kuhn, "paradigms" are our models or patterns of reality, shaped by our understanding and experience into a system of rules and assumptions about the world around us. The call for restructuring in education, emerging from a profound sense that education is not working for all children, requires a transformation in how we see schools, students, and their families. If we are to find a new and equitable vision of what education can and should be, new lenses are required to change the way we look at schools and the populations in them – as demonstrated by our "Now" thinkers below.

THAT IS THEN . . . THIS IS NOW...

"I don't think it's our responsibility to pay our taxes to provide for them. You cannot give an equal chance to every single person. If you did, you'd be changing the whole economic system."

– A. Rye, New York, teenager whose family moved to the suburbs from the Bronx. From *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*

"We have to overturn the decision that education is a fundamental right. That decision will cost money, and someone has to protect the taxpayers."

– An Ohio politician. From *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*

"Illegal immigrants in our classrooms are having an extremely detrimental effect on the quality of education we are able to provide to the legal residents. When illegal immigrants sit down in public school classrooms, the desk, textbooks, blackboards in effect become stolen property, stolen from the students rightfully entitled to those resources."

– Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.), floor debate, U.S. House of Representatives, March 20, 1996

"The single largest variable that predicts SAT scores is family income. If you want higher SAT scores, you need to get your kids born into wealthier families. You know, it's great to tell kids to pull themselves up by their own boot straps, but you better put boots on them first."

– Paul Houston, American Association of School Administrators, Washington, D.C.

"Children given the opportunity to learn in a nourishing environment will flourish. They will care more about school, they'll be less likely to drop out, they'll be excited about learning, and they will have the chance to succeed."

– Jeffrey Hayden Executive Producer, *Children in America's Schools*

"Washington [D.C.] doesn't understand the communities of America...It doesn't understand the people, the problem, the nature of the school system. Thus, it becomes important that, throughout America, we begin to reweave the fabric of community...When schools, police, social workers, public health nurses, community activists, students, physicians and business [people] come together and make true partnerships, we can make that incredible difference."

- U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno. From *San Antonio Express-News*, June 3, 1994

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Bilingual Education is About Bridging and Building

Maria Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: Dr. Robledo Montecel delivered the keynote presentation to the Rio Grande Valley Texas Association for Bilingual Education in September. This is an adaptation of the text of that presentation.

To begin, I want to say a word of congratulations to all of you. As bilingual educators, you have welcomed our children and nurtured them – in two languages. You have stimulated their curiosity and imagination – in two languages. You have provided a safe place for them to be active young learners – in two languages.

You have opened your arms and your hearts to them, and you have done so in a language they understand – in the language of their parents and of their parents' parents. In doing so, you have made possible what would have been unthinkable only 30 years ago when in *this* state, teachers who spoke Spanish in the classroom were committing a Class A misdemeanor.

As bilingual educators, you have supported each other, enriched each other, shared concerns and successes together and – most importantly – you have made a difference in the lives of children here in the Valley who bring to your schools the richness that is the Spanish language. Just as yesterday's children are today's leaders, today's children are our leaders of tomorrow.

Children do not make schools poor. Poor policies make schools poor.

As Hispanic people, we bring much that is vital to our future as a nation. We are leaders in policy development in the U.S. Cabinet, in the halls of Congress, in state capitols, in city governments, in schools, in boards of education, in classrooms and in neighborhoods. Political campaigners try to woo Hispanic voters, not because it is politically correct, but because the smart ones recognize the power of Hispanic voters.

We are leaders in the world of work. More and more, we own businesses and head up corporations. With a current population of 27 million Hispanics in the United States, purchasing power alone is expected to reach $477 billion by the year 2000.

We have greatly influenced the culture of this society, more significantly than many people realize. The popular media talks about the growth in the number of Mexican restaurants and reports, with amazement, that the *Macarena* is now the most danced-to song. Even Vice President Gore did his very unique rendition of *La Macarena* on national television.

What is not reported as well in the media or elsewhere are the contributions of our values of family, of community and of faith. As technology booms and the world shrinks, these strengths will become the foundation of our country. In about 50 years, Hispanics will be the largest population group in the nation – one out of every four faces. That prediction alone is what has sparked some of the fires we are fighting today.

Earlier, I mentioned political campaigners wanting our votes. They want our votes and at the same time they are seeking ways to reduce our numbers and power. For example, the U.S. Congress has been debating immigration policy. No problem. Any sovereign nation has a right to establish and enforce immigration policy.

Part of that debate, however, was an amendment by Rep. Elton Gallegly of

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Public Engagement: Making Schools *Our* Schools

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) seeks one goal: improvement of public education for all children. Created in a time of activism, IDRA joined litigation for the rights of minority and immigrant children to be educated, fought for reform of public school financing and advocated bilingual education. Today, activists who are organized for very different purposes attack hard-won victories in these arenas.

The nationally-initiated efforts to reform schools, now becoming better known within the educational community, remain unknown to many citizens concerned about their public schools. Too few people know that failing schools can be made effective, that *all* students can be taught. As handfuls of education specialists develop content standards for reading, mathematics and science and policy specialists devise politically expedient solutions, few within the broader community are even aware, much less involved, in these critical discussions. Absent from the deliberations are parents, classroom teachers, representatives from the larger community (e.g., older citizens), businesses, the social service sector, religious groups, community groups, minority group representatives and others who have a vested interest in education.

At the same time, a quieter movement gathers strength through community-initiated attempts to improve schools. Effective schools demonstrate that we know how to teach any child. Parents and the concerned communities of public schools score local victories in "taking back their schools." Research on these communities often reflects extensive involvement in local school reform by diverse groups and the forging of effective broad-based coalitions that encourage and sustain school change.

This issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* looks at some key issues facing public schools and communities:

- Accountability
- Bilingual education
- Immigrant education
- School finance
- Use of public money for private schooling

Public engagement can help communities reclaim schools, making what were perceived as someone else's problem – the whole community's responsibility or, more ideally, the community's wholeness.

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California that would allow states to close school doors to the children of undocumented workers. It becomes problematic when people are made to believe that children of undocumented workers are making our schools poor. Children do not make schools poor. Poor policies make schools poor.

In Texas, schools depend on property taxes for revenue. If a school district has to rely only on taxing low wealth properties within its boundaries, it will have less revenue even with greater support.

Children do not make schools poor. Schools are poor because many people continue to believe it is okay for some children to look at the sky through leaky roofs and repatched holes in roofs while others look through planetariums. Schools are poor because the Texas Supreme Court, in its school finance decision, said it is okay for some children to get a *privileged* education as long as all have a *minimally adequate* education.

In a second example of the fires we are fighting today, moves for English-only laws have stirred up again. More than 20 states have official English laws, and Congress is considering several proposals. The one with the most support would require government agencies to conduct official business in English. It may sound harmless to many people since most government communications are in English anyway, but such measures would have many serious consequences – intended and unintended.

English-only laws would affect courtrooms and people's right to a fair trial. They would cause hardship for some businesses. They may disenfranchise citizens from the voting process. They may limit or end altogether bilingual education and effective programs that teach English. They are probably unconstitutional.

What English-only laws do *not* do is provide more opportunities for learning English. Bilingual education provides opportunities for learning English, and yet, all research and professional development money for bilingual education was cut from the Office of Bilingual Education in the U.S. Department of Education. English classes for adults provide opportunities for learning English, and yet, every year thousands and thousands of people are turned away from English classes because there is no room and no allocation of resources.

We are also dealing with heightened negative perceptions about what bilingual education is. A family in the state of New York has sued the school district because their child was placed in a bilingual program. The family believed this would hold back their child.

There is a very long list of challenges that we face. But, being here with you today, I am reminded of the good things. There is reason to celebrate. As I see the faces of our children, of these young people from Derry Elementary School, I know there is hope.

After much work, most of the provisions in California's Proposition 187 – including the education restrictions – have been ruled unconstitutional and thrown out by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The moves to cut off education of children of undocumented workers are stopped for the moment.

WE MUST ASSURE THAT BILINGUAL PROGRAMS ARE QUALITY PROGRAMS AND THAT WE CAN DEMONSTRATE SO IN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY RATINGS. WE MUST DOCUMENT SUCCESSES AND TELL OTHERS ABOUT THOSE SUCCESSES.

People are speaking out against the English-only proposals: city councils, chambers of commerce, business organizations, police and civic organizations, columnists and editorial boards. Many organizations, like IDRA, are speaking for English-plus, which encourages using English *plus* other languages. And the majority of U.S. voters support bilingual education as a better way for children to learn English and excel in all their subjects.

Thirty-one years ago, bilingual education was conceived at the federal level. It was conceived as an act of faith. We believed and hoped it would work. But there was no way to know for sure. We just knew that what had been done before was not working. Now we *know* that the most effective way to teach English to children who speak another language is through an adequate bilingual education program. There is much evidence to support this: the evidence of research and the evidence of children's achievement and self-esteem.

We often talk about bilingual education as something apart from everything else. But just as Hispanics are contributing to the larger society, bilingual education can contribute to the larger educational system.

Historically, our educational system has been designed to "select and sort": To select and sort the smart from the not so smart, the future corporate executives from the laborers, the easy to teach from the "troublemakers."

Designed to serve White middle-class English-speaking students, schools select and sort very well. Minorities lag behind in educational achievement. Hispanics have the highest dropout rates in Texas and in the country.

But, we all pay a price. For every group of students that drops out each year, the Texas economy loses $1.17 billion in criminal justice and social service costs and in lost tax revenue. By the year 2000 – just four years from now – up to 80 percent of the jobs in the United States will require cognitive, rather than manual skills. More than half of the jobs will require at least some post-secondary education.

We cannot afford to *not* prepare our children for the next millennium. Our future leaders need knowledge, problem-solving skills, confidence in themselves and, most importantly, a sense of vision for all.

When bilingual education was conceived, it was not conceived to "select and sort." It was conceived to "bridge and build." Our intention was to greet children at the schoolhouse door, to welcome them and to build on the strengths that they bring with them. Our intention was to bridge them into another language as they learn their subject matter.

We, as bilingual educators, can reform the larger educational system by teaching schools to "bridge and build" as well. What does this mean?

First, "bridge and build" means that all students must be taught in a language they understand. And they must be taught in that language until they are ready to succeed academically in English.

The Texas Education Agency reported this month that 60 to 70 percent of the third and fourth grade students failed the benchmark Spanish-language TAAS test. At the same time, the vast majority of 1,500 bilingual educators who were surveyed said that the students *were* adequately prepared.

When members of the State Board of Education talked about the report, many focused on the poor performance of the students. Commissioner Moses explained that most of the students tested in Spanish

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ISSUE: IMMIGRANT EDUCATION

OBSTACLES TO IMMIGRANT PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS

Pam McCollum, Ph.D.

Educators are sensitive to charges that they fail to adequately prepare their students. Why is it, however, that teachers at all levels seem to question the performance of their colleagues in the grades immediately preceding theirs? For example, exasperated high school teachers roll their eyes and question, "What were the teachers at the middle school doing over there last year anyway?" Interestingly, those same middle school teachers who resent having their performance questioned, often pass the buck to their colleagues at the elementary level in exactly the same way.

The absurdity of this situation does not stop there, however, for there is a tendency for educators at all levels to complain about today's parents whom they claim are the *real* source of children's educational difficulties.

In this article, I examine obstacles to parent involvement for families from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly focusing on immigrant families, and explore reasons their ways of interacting with the school are often misinterpreted as not valuing or supporting their children's education.

The following are examples of commonly heard complaints from teachers and administrators regarding parent involvement efforts with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds:

- "We always send fliers home, but no one ever shows up at our PTA meetings."
- "Do you believe it? When I asked for a parent to come to school to discuss her daughter's behavior, an older brother showed up."
- "Can't they take the time to teach their children the ABCs? Why don't they send their children to school *ready* to learn?"
- "None of these parents value education. They never respond to our invitations to volunteer for school activities."
- "Why can't parents come to Back to School Night? It's only one night a year."

Lack of Understanding

At the base of these complaints regarding the perceived lack of immigrant parent involvement in their children's education, is a lack of understanding on the part of parents and educators. First of all, educators in the United States tend to believe that parents should ideally be *interventionists* in their children's learning. Middle-class parents demonstrate that they value education and are concerned about their children's learning by attending school meetings, volunteering for activities, helping their children with their homework and ensuring their children begin school knowing their numbers and letters as preparation for school literacy instruction.

Immigrant parents, on the other hand, often come from cultures where the proper role of a concerned parent is *non-interventionist* in nature (Bhachu, 1985). Parents from such backgrounds believe they should not intervene in the school's business or question the teacher's practices and expertise. Garcia found that most Hispanic parents felt parent intervention constituted interference in the affairs of the school (1990).

U.S. educators often do not understand that parents can actually place a very high value on education while not having a high degree of engagement with the school. While parents from diverse cultural backgrounds may not demonstrate the expected degree of engagement with the school according to middle-class standards, they can show that they value and support their children's learning in other ways.

Something that often goes unnoticed is the fact that immigrant students often have very high rates of school attendance. Instead of faulting parents from different cultural backgrounds for their low degree of engagement with the school, educators should focus on the fact that ensuring their children's attendance demonstrates that parents value and actively support their children's learning.

The other half of the equation that is responsible for misunderstandings between immigrant parents and educators, is parents' basic lack of understanding of the U.S. educational system. They do not understand that they are expected to interact with schools in certain ways in order to demonstrate that they value education and want their children to learn. Parents who themselves often have had very little formal education, entrust their children to the schools and the *experts* whom they feel know better than they how to educate their children. We know that children from cultures where parents view their role as non-interventionist in nature can attain high levels of academic achievement (Gibson, 1988).

The concept of school "readiness" as used within the U.S. middle class is also a very foreign concept to most immigrant parents. An ethnographic study on school readiness in three communities outside Boulder, Colorado, that are varied by social class and ethnicity found that the concept of readiness was socially constructed by teachers and parents at each site (Graue, 1993). As such, it differed substantially between the upper middle-class community where most of the parents were professionals who worked in nearby high tech industries and the Mexican American working-class segment of a neighboring town. For middle-class and upper middle-class parents, readiness meant that their children arrived at school already knowing their ABCs and numbers and were armed with a vast array of preliteracy skills. Most of children in this group had also attended at least two years of preschool prior to entering kindergarten.

Immigrant Education *- continued on page 6*

> MY CHILDREN KNOW THE SYSTEM IS UNFAIR.
> THEY ALSO KNOW THAT THEY ARE LIVING IN A RICH SOCIETY.
> THEY SEE IT ON TV AND IN THE MOVIES, SO THEY KNOW THIS OTHER WORLD EXISTS. WHEN YOU TELL THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN'T FIND THE MONEY TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A DECENT PLACE TO GO TO SCHOOL, THEY DON'T BELIEVE IT.
>
> Mother in Roxbury, Massachusetts. From *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*

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Immigrant Education - continued from page 5

For working-class Mexican American families, readiness meant children were ready to attend school when they reached the legal age for school entry.

Parent's Jobs

A second obstacle that prevents immigrant parents from responding to school parent outreach programs is the fact that most immigrant families are busy desperately trying to earn a living. It is not uncommon for both parents to work more than one minimum wage job in order to make ends meet. These jobs would be in jeopardy if a parent was away even for a short time. In such situations, even if parents understood what the school expected of them, it is highly unlikely they would be free to attend school functions.

Language Differences

Another obstacle, almost too obvious to mention, to immigrant parents' participation in school is their inability to communicate with teachers and staff in English. In many cases, lack of English skills coupled with low levels of schooling, make parents feel ashamed to interact with school staff. When an older sibling who speaks English shows up to speak to a teacher about his little sister's behavior, parents are not shirking their responsibility. They are resolving the situation in the most satisfactory manner possible given their resources. Moreover, in the case of parents with limited knowledge of English, sending a sibling who speaks English to school ensures they will get the best interpretation of the teacher's message possible. Viewed in a more positive light, sending an English-speaking sibling is a successful functional adaptation strategy for interacting in a new social system where one does not speak the language.

Valuing, Not Changing Parents

Most programs for parent involvement are centered upon the premise that parents need to be changed in order to teach them how to work successfully with their own children. Unfortunately, this approach is a deficit approach that ignores that parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as working-class parents, may have ways of interacting with their children that support learning, yet differ from the patterns exhibited by U.S. middle-class parents.

These deficit programs attempt to teach parents how to be *effective* parents and teachers without acknowledging or discovering how parents already support their children's education within their own culture.

> ***...Parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as working-class parents, may have ways of interacting with their children that support learning, yet differ from the patterns exhibited by U.S. middle-class parents.***

Research has shown that parents can actually teach teachers and students when community-based knowledge is brought into the classroom and becomes the basis of class instruction. The "funds of knowledge" is based upon ethnographic research of students' informal learning networks in language minority communities and homes (Moll, Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1990). That knowledge in turn, is used as the basis of lessons in the classroom that engage children in meaningful literacy practices as part of a classroom community that is connected to their home communities and interests. This approach has been highly successful in improving literacy instruction for working-class language-minority students.

A prelude to more effective parent involvement programs should include a careful examination of what is actually *known* about culturally different families, their attitudes regarding education and how they support their children's education through the family and their informal social networks.

Faculty study groups are an excellent vehicle for exploring these issues through the readings of ethnographies of the immigrant experience. A particularly useful ethnography for those interested in examining the gap between culturally diverse families and schools is a recent book, *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distance Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait* (Valdes, 1996).

The author, Guadalupe Valdes, tells the stories of 10 immigrant families from rural northern Mexico who settled outside El Paso, Texas, whom she studied for several years. The book paints an excellent picture of how parents' cultural expectations and values regarding education are often misinterpreted by the school and how school practices can conflict with family expectations. It affords educators the opportunity to learn about the immigrant experience while at the same time re-examining their assumptions about how parent involvement programs need to be refocused. The author does not give pat formulae or a list of "how to's" for reorganizing parent involvement programs. She makes a very strong case that before parents can be involved, they have to be treated "*con respeto*" which means knowing who they are. Maybe it is time we educators did our homework.

Resources

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Upcoming Events

The World of Play

• The Changing Nature of Childhood
• Children's Play & Play Environments
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May 16-18, 1997
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WHAT IS SCIENCE LITERACY?

Joseph Vigil

At the 1989 University of Nova commencement exercises, a marine biology filmmaker asked new graduates to explain why it is hotter in the summer than in the winter. Only a few of the students queried could answer correctly. Many of the students responded with the common misconception that the earth is closer to the sun in the summer months.

Now, admittedly, we can probably get by in life without ever understanding that it is, in fact, the earth's angle of tilt in relation to the sun that accounts for our seasons. But would we ever appreciate why days are shorter in December than in June? Or why some people are skiing in Australia when others are sunbathing in Texas? We would also conceivably have difficulty designing a solar home or navigating by the North Star.

But even more fundamentally, without some knowledge of the earth's patterns, we would have no reason to value them, to value the annual rotation of constellations in the night sky and the stories and myths to which they gave birth, or to understand the cultural impact of summer's extended twilight on the people of the Arctic.

Similarly, the filmmaker asked the new graduates if they knew what effects the El Niño phenomenon had on the earth's weather patterns. Being an oceanographer and having taken a class in college on climate, I knew that El Niño [the Christchild], although a Christmastime event, was not the "bearer of much joy." Similar to the seven-year cycles of the biblical plagues, El Niño refers to the three- to seven-year recurrences of westerly winds that drive warm equatorial waters toward the coasts of Ecuador and Peru and basically stop the upwelling of cooler, nutrient-rich deep waters. El Niño events, such as those in 1982-83, bring droughts to some areas, while floods devastate others. Many people living in different regions of the globe see and experience the effects of El Niño without fully understanding the actual phenomenon.

For too long, as a society we have fostered the notion that science is the bastion of the egghead. We tend to believe that to be a scientist you must have an IQ of at least 160 and possess the insights of someone like the main character in the recent movie *Phenomenon*, who suddenly can learn things fully like another language in less than 30 minutes by reading a textbook.

INCORPORATING HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES, REAL WORLD EXPERIENCES AND CURRENT USE OF TECHNOLOGY INTO INSTRUCTION IS A KEY TO PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH EXCITING AND SELF-DISCOVERED LEARNING.

Science vocabulary clearly has been a key part of most science instruction. By one estimate, students in the average high school biology class are exposed to more than 2,400 new terms in a year; more new words than they would be asked to learn in the typical high school French class.

Nobel-prize-winning physicist Leon Lederman has often lamented the way we bludgeon our children with dreary facts and "take naturally curious, natural born scientists and beat the curiosity right out of them" (*Perspectives on Science*, 1993-94).

The bottom line is that we are not trying to produce outstanding *Science Bowl* contestants but rather citizens who can make confident and rational judgments on science and technology issues. These issues may be personal (e.g., How can I better water my garden to increase the yield and size of my tomatoes?) or societal (e.g., Should the NASA space shuttle program turn over day-to-day operations to private industry in order to save money?).

Simply put: Science touches everyone's life. Whether studying the behavior of the beluga whale at Sea World or working in a chemistry lab to develop an environmentally friendly refrigerant, science is fundamentally a way of thinking about our world. Currently in the news, deformed frogs are being found all across Minnesota, into neighboring Wisconsin and South Dakota, and even as far away as Quebec and Vermont (*San Antonio Express-News*, 1996). Is their deformity due to an environmental contaminant? Is this an early biological indicator that something is wrong with our environment? This could be important to our survival and the quality of life here on earth.

Modern science is arguably based on two key assumptions about our world:

1. There is an underlying order to the seeming disorder in our universe.
2. Events in nature have causes that can be identified and understood.

These assumptions dictate that science be a collective practice, with individuals across cultures and centuries sharing their observations, their hunches, their insights and their dead ends. The understanding of ourselves and our world is such an immense undertaking that it would be foolish for us to assume that science could be practiced in any other way.

As such, science then becomes an effort in which anyone can engage. Even my five-year-old boy, Patrick, does this when he observes the billions of butterflies migrating through San Antonio in September and when he notices the simple harmonic motion in his "Slinky." Albert Einstein wrote, "The whole of science is nothing more than the refinement of everyday thinking" (1956). Encouraging children to ask questions about their world around them promotes science literacy at an early age.

So what does it mean to be scientifically literate? Perhaps it means that we ask lots of questions and make many observations, that we engage in furious debates but are open to many possibilities, that we maintain a healthy skepticism to minimize the risk of being misled or fooled. Perhaps it simply means that we rediscover the wonder of our youth.

Educators then have the challenge of covering grade-specific material for their science program while providing their students with the true scientific method that is used in research to discover new principles of science. Incorporating hands-on activities, real world experiences and current use of technology into instruction is a key to providing students with exciting and self-discovered learning. Perhaps, in this manner we can inspire the nobel prize winners, astronauts and Albert Einsteins of the next millennium.

Resources

Einstein, Albert. *Physics and Reality*. (1956).

Perspectives on Science (Winter 1993-94), pg. 2.

San Antonio Express-News. "Deformed Frogs Raising Fears" (San Antonio, Texas: *San Antonio Express-News*, October 1996).

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are economically disadvantaged, and *that* is why the scores were so low. He claimed that another factor is that the students and teachers lack experience with the test. So *that* is why the scores were so low.

More than one in nine of those students tested were in bilingual programs as opposed to ESL. But, the truth is that many of those programs are essentially English programs. A study by the National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education found that English is used 66 percent of the time in kindergarten bilingual education programs. English is used 75 percent of the time in second grade.

So, if children are not being taught in Spanish, how can they be expected to test well in Spanish? How can they demonstrate what they have learned?

In one school, Barrack Elementary in Houston, LEP students are taught in their native language through the third grade. English is not introduced until the fourth grade. This past spring, at the end of the year, those fourth graders at Barrack took the *English*-language TAAS. They had *very good* scores. In fact, because of this, Barrack is categorized as a "recognized school." Success stories like this one are also occurring in Valley schools.

So then, the *critical* question is not: Are the children capable of learning? It is not: Are they economically disadvantaged? It is not: Do they or their teachers have experience with the TAAS? The critical question is: Are the bilingual programs *really* bilingual? Are children being taught in the language they understand?

Effective bilingual education programs help children succeed. In doing so, we are linking the past with the future. We are building bridges and promoting opportunity.

Second, "bridge and build" means that families and communities will be involved in schools in new ways, in ways that build on the resources that families and communities offer.

Historically, schools have viewed parents through deficit-model eyes. One widely accepted assumption is that something – or many things – are wrong with Hispanic students, their families and their communities. By the dim light of this deficit model, the school may see itself as trying to free the students from the faults and the weaknesses of their backgrounds.

I read recently about a proposal by John Henry Stanford, a retired Army general who is now heading up the Seattle Public Schools. He is advocating – among other things – that we issue report cards that grade parents.

After reading about that idea, I made a list of the criteria that parents would most probably be graded on if this were to be put in place. The criteria would probably include reviewing schoolwork with the child, helping the child with homework, providing a quiet place for homework to be done, talking to the teacher if the child is having difficulties and reading to the child for 15 minutes a day. These are things most of the parent involvement literature says work.

Then, I looked at this list and wondered what grade the parents of us in this room would have gotten when we were in school.

For the first criterion, many of our parents could not do a lot of "reviewing of our schoolwork" because they did not speak English. They also were not very schooled themselves, not formally at least.

For the second criterion, "helping the child with homework," they could do that to the degree that it was possible with their not speaking English and their own limited formal education.

"Provide a quiet place for homework to be done." Our parents could do whatever they could given that many of us lived in small houses, given that there were other kids besides ourselves and given that some of us moved to other places a few months out of the year to pick grapes or something.

"Talking to the teacher if the child is having difficulties." Well, if our mothers talked to our high school teachers, the teachers would have a lot of trouble understanding our mothers' Spanish because they only knew English.

And the last criterion, "reading to the child for 15 minutes a day." I guess our parents would get a good grade on that if you counted Spanish. But probably not, because in most circles that's a bit "suspect."

So, if our parents had been graded on those criteria, they would have gotten a failing grade. Such is *not* the case. I give our parents an A+. They were the most educated people we knew in the truest sense of education. And *they* are the main reason we succeeded in school. As a matter of fact, from a deficit perspective, people would say that our success as educators is in spite of our parents, an *aberration*.

So, in terms of what works about educational reform, report cards and criteria like these for parents don't work. They particularly don't work given the stereotypes about our parents.

Coming Up!

In January, the
IDRA Newsletter
focuses on
organizing for schooling.

I tuned in to the Democratic Convention last month and heard Christopher Reeve speaking. Did you hear what he said? He said:

> I know in the last few years we have heard about something called "family values." And, like many of you, I have struggled to figure out what that means. Since my accident, I have found a definition that seems to make sense. I think it means that we *are all family*, and that *we all have value*.
>
> It's so simple.

In the course of working with Hispanic students and families during the past almost-2 decades, IDRA has developed and built a theory and practice of valuing families and students. The underlying philosophy accepts families as they are and works with their strengths. It regards students, their families and communities as offering resources. Successful programs organize and bridge these resources in support of the students' efforts.

Third, "bridge and build" means that we will create bridges between schools and technology. All children must have the opportunity to test-drive these innovations. They must be prepared for tomorrow's advances in technology.

This means making sure we have access to technology in bilingual classrooms. This means having some level of understanding of the technology itself and how to apply it. It also means having increased levels of literacy because communicating and researching via computer, for example, requires strong writing, reading and spelling skills.

Fourth, "bridge and build" means that schools will acknowledge and build the ability of bilingual teachers to do their job. They will not be rushed into teaching the TAAS. Bilingual teachers will have the time to think and plan so that their classrooms will run smoothly. They will have access to training in new innovations and best practices. They will have the freedom to

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make decisions and "break the rules" in order to make their classrooms the best they can be. They will be allowed to make mistakes and experiment. They will be encouraged to use their special talents to make their classrooms a loving, learning place for children.

Finally, "bridge and build" means that we will hold ourselves accountable for where LEP students are in their learning. We will not buy into the deficit-model belief that says "these kids can't achieve." We know better.

We must ensure that the new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills incorporate what is appropriate for bilingual students, not as a sidebar but as an integral part of the system. We must demand good policy and needed resources. We must assure that bilingual programs are quality programs and that we can demonstrate so in assessment and accountability ratings. We must document successes and tell others about those successes.

By *valuing* our students, we acknowledge that every student can be taught and that none is expendable.

Let me conclude with a little story. With your permission, I'll do it in Spanish:

Erase que se era, en un pueblo lejano, bueno no era tan lejano, era en Tejas. Habia un hombre de mucha distinción que sufrió muchas perdidas en su negocio. Perdió todo y quedó en la calle.

En su desesperación acudió a Dios. Por favor Diosito, rezo un dia, tienes que ayudarme. Por favor déjame ganar la loteria.

Nada. No hubo respuesta. El siguiente miércoles y el siguiente sábado, y nada. Y rezó con más fervor. Por favor mi Dios Santo, tienes que hacer algo. La única manera en que puedo salir de este apuro es ganando la loteria. Hazme que gane.

Así siguió por varias semanas. Cada miércoles y sábado rezaba con más ganas. El hombre pensó que Dios lo habia abandonado. Estaba en las últimas. Por favor te lo ruego mi Dios. Todo lo que necesito es ganar la loteria.

Después de un momento, una voz le dijo (Dios es bilingüe): "¡Give me a break. Por lo menos ve y cómprate un boleto!"

Así que hay que comprar un cachito de la loteria.

[There once was a man who suffered a severe financial setback. His business failed, and he just couldn't land on his feet. He became destitute. Finally, in utter despair, he turned to God.

"Please, God," he prayed. "You've got to help me. Please let me win the lottery." There was no answer. No response.

The next day was no better. And he prayed again. "Please, God," he prayed. "you've got to do something. The only way I'll get back on my feet is if I win the lottery. Make me win."

This went on for a few days. The man thought that God wasn't hearing him. After a while he was beyond desperation. With the last breath of hope in his body, he turned to God. "I beg of you, dear God," he said. "All I need is to win the lottery."

After a moment of silence, a voice came back to him saying, "Give me a break. At least buy a ticket!"]

Buying a ticket means taking action. It means acting on our commitment. If we are going to "bridge and build," if we are going to prepare our children effectively and give them real choices in life, if we are going to celebrate Hispanic families and our successes, we must *act now*.

Dr. Maria Robledo Montecel is the executive director of IDRA.

IDRA *Workshop On Workshops (WOW)*

January 31 - February 1, 1996
The Center at IDRA
San Antonio, Texas

This two-day experience spurs participants to become **more effective presenters**. The workshop uses an experience-based model that has practical application for you in your job. Current, research-based principles provide a context for participants to collaborate in creating informative, practical and engaging presentations. The *WOW* is **highly participatory** and directly addresses participants' needs and challenges. During the *WOW*, participants will:

- Experience a **complete process** for planning and conducting workshops.
- Review **principles of adult learning**.
- Contrast **needs assessment** approaches.
- Write and refine workshop **objectives**.
- Design innovative **activities**.
- Practice and **expand facilitation skills**.
- **Network** with other professionals.

The *WOW* is facilitated by Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., lead trainer in IDRA's Division of Professional Development and creator of the highly popular *WOW*. With more than 25 years of professional training experience, he can teach your staff or group the techniques every trainer needs to conduct meaningful workshops!

The cost is $150 per participant. This includes all training materials and personalized instruction, plus a copy of the *WOW Workbook* (a $25 value). Designed for people who are responsible for conducting training and workshops, the *WOW* is particularly useful for participants who bring workshop titles and materials that they want to work on.

To schedule a WOW for your group, call Rogelio Lopez del Bosque or Aurelio Montemayor, 210-684-8180.

William S. White, chairman, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

BERLIN WALLS OF THE MIND

The Berlin Wall. What does it mean to you? Stop a moment, don't read any further, close your eyes, and picture the city of Berlin with the wall running through it. What images do you see? What does it symbolize to you?

Now, picture South Africa and another Berlin Wall, a racial wall, if you will. What pictures come into your mind? Let's move to another part of the world – Bosnia. What kind of Berlin Wall divides the people of Bosnia? How impenetrable does that wall seem to be? And what of America? Think about our urban centers – Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York. Do they have Berlin Walls? What do they look like? What must they feel like, depending upon which side of the wall you face? Finally, think about your own community. Is there a Berlin Wall in your own backyard? How did it get there? How does it divide your community? More importantly, how do you make it go away?

In going through this thought process, one can't help but realize that mental walls are just as formidable as walls of bricks and mortar. Motivated often by fear, we build mental barriers – Berlin Walls of the mind – to protect ourselves. The problem is that when we build walls – whether mental or physical – we destroy our relationships with one another. And that connectedness or belonging is fundamental to community and civil society.

Over the past several years, I and others at the Mott Foundation have discussed the concept of Berlin Walls of the Mind. For each one of us, the concept evokes different images and visions. Yet for each of us, it is a powerful and instructive symbol for the divisiveness of our times.

I have found these discussions intriguing, particularly in light of the fact that the nation, at the brink of a new millennium, is arguing with itself over values, over its future direction, over its role in the world, over its responsibilities to its citizens and even over its very identity.

For me, defining America as a community starts with a civil society. A civil society is a place – first and foremost – where there is a sense of community or connectedness. A civil society embraces tolerance and respect for not just the diversity of people and cultures, but also the diversity of ideas. A civil society is a place where freedom is celebrated, and justice and equity are paramount. A civil society is a place where the rights of individuals are respected, and individuals respect the rights and needs of the greater community. A civil society is a place where civic participation undergirds everything.

I don't know about you, but I have serious doubts that the United States of the mid-1990s can lay claim to being a truly civil society. Perhaps we never could. Some argue that for too many Americans, freedom still is only a word. The fact remains that without civil society, democracy is tenuous at best. But rather than building a civil society, Americans seem bent upon building walls.

Over the past many months, I have talked with people from all walks of life who also are troubled by a sense that we just aren't as civil a society as we should be. They talk about things as complex as kids in our cities gunning each other down in a daily bloodbath and things as simple as our rage when someone cuts us off on the highway. They perceive an increasing desire on the part of Americans to turn off, tune out and reject the civic life around them. They question what is in store for our children – and even our democracy – if we become a nation with little or no connectedness.

One can easily see where this concern comes from. We are a nation grappling with complex issues, ranging from welfare reform to reinventing schools to social and economic instability. Over the past couple of years, we have endured far too many defining moments that have contributed to our sense of futility and isolation. Together we have witnessed: the inexplicable growth in church burnings across the country, particularly black churches; the Waco, Oklahoma City bombings and most recently Freemen crises; the O.J. Simpson trial and the affirmative action debate; California's bitter vote on immigration; and a welfare reform debate that, for all its good intentions, more often tended to scapegoat the poor for their poverty and to take out our national frustrations on the most vulnerable members of society.

Other disturbing trends have further numbed our sensibilities: the explosion of violence among young people; the unchecked rise in hate radio and trash talk tabloid television; an unrelenting torrent of sensationalized media coverage; and the growth of sports-related violence.

The cumulative effect of these incivilities, great and small, has taken its toll. Americans show an increasing sense of intolerance that all too often translates into self-imposed isolationism and extremism. To my mind, this sense of isolation – wall-building, so to say – has become one of the dominant characteristics of contemporary American life.

Having spent years guiding a foundation whose activities speak to the fundamental belief that connectedness – community, if you will – is essential to democracy, I find it deeply disturbing to realize how fragile the idea of community has become. I can think of no quicker way of letting democracy slip away from us than by walling ourselves off from each other.

This belief has been soundly reinforced over the past several years by our work in a number of former Iron Curtain countries, which until recently knew all about walls and little about democracy. Moreover, we have spent considerable time in South Africa, another new democracy, which until very recently had its own legally sanctioned walls of exclusion, inequality and oppression.

What we have seen is eye-opening: countries virtually destroyed because of hatred and discrimination, because of a one-party system

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based on intolerance for differing people and ideas. But we also saw hope and determination. We heard how ordinary people with a vision of a civil society were able to topple oppression; how they had the courage to tear down the walls that have separated them as people, shake off the structures of the past and seek a better tomorrow – a tomorrow built upon inclusion, participation, diversity. Without question, this is an incredible challenge, given their history and those individuals who would derail any efforts toward an inclusive society.

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Seeing these struggles reminded me of one of the most famous walls of all time, which sliced into the very heart of community. In its heyday, the Berlin Wall was a gray monster, complete with barbed wire and armed guards, a horribly apt symbol of the Cold War. I have wondered many times how the people of Berlin survived this near-fatal blow.

But the fact remains that when citizens on both sides of the Berlin Wall knocked it down, they took part in the greatest symbolic act of our era. They proved a simple truth: The democratic impulse is fundamentally at odds with walls that separate the prosperous from the impoverished, the free from the oppressed.

I think we in the United States have lost sight of that impulse, and I fear that the democratic promise here at home is slipping away from us with every wall we build that destroys our connectedness.

Charles Stewart Mott had a keen understanding of the fundamental contradiction between walls that keep us apart and the commitment to the common good that defines a democracy. That is why he saw such value in supporting programs that build social capital – programs such as community schools, which stressed community improvement through active adult and child participation, training and lifelong learning.

From my perspective, such partnerships and civic participation undergird a civil society. They are the tools that create and maintain our sense of connectedness, our sense of community. And it is at the roots of community that we find our most fundamental values such as caring, decency, trust, tolerance, honesty, forgiveness and faith. These common values – not real or imagined walls "protecting" us from one another – are the key to the future.

But there is another, critical element that has gotten away from us in America. Here again, we can learn from the world's fledgling democracies. Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev, the president of Bulgaria, put it succinctly when he told me that a society cannot be democratic or civil unless it has a fundamental tolerance and respect for differing and often competing ideas and opinions.

It should concern us that more and more people feel so disenfranchised that they accept no responsibility to join the debate. But we can't achieve consensus unless we come together and until we tear down the walls that separate us. Unless a society is willing and committed to discussing competing ideas, it will never be respectful and tolerant of different cultures and people or different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Tolerance of people and ideas go hand in hand.

Because I have thought a great deal about democratic values, my own vision is crystal clear. I firmly believe that with the right kind of nurturing, people can reclaim, re-establish and reinvigorate our democracy. We should not be a nation of strangers, but a nation engaged. We need to realize that it is only be actively participating that we can change what we believe to be wrong. And we can start right in our own backyard.

First and foremost, there is no room in a democracy for spectators. As an election monitor this year for the Palestinian elections, I saw how proud these citizens were to cast their ballots. For them, it was an important step not only in civic duty, but also in nation building. Likewise, our work in South Africa, particularly over the past two years, has given us a genuine appreciation for what democracy means to those who have been denied it. There we saw "new" citizens stand in line not just for hours, but for days, to exercise their right to vote. Even in Bosnia, where again, I was privileged to serve as an election monitor, I saw the determination of people to have a voice in the future of their civil-war-torn nation.

Here at home, where the right to vote has been a cornerstone for our society, many of us can't be bothered. We must make the exercise

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Issue: Bilingual Education

Top 10 Questions Parents Should Ask About Bilingual Education at their Child's Campus

Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D. and Adela Solis, Ph.D.

Parental involvement in education provides a unique opportunity for parents to grow in their roles as teachers and decision-makers. Parents have an opportunity to help their children learn by helping with instruction at home and at school. They also can influence learning by providing input into decisions about programs designed to address their children's special needs.

To be influential, however, parents need to understand how schools and their programs operate. When experts look at this, they often see that parents are not informed about critical ways the schools are supposed to help their children. They see also that parents usually are not sufficiently confident to volunteer their expertise as parents for school activities or to ask key questions about the teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms.

This lack of understanding is particularly problematic for parents of language minority students who are not proficient in English, either because they do not speak English well themselves or because they feel alienated from the school system. It is critical that they comprehend that schools have the responsibility to help their children and that they know exactly how this charge should be dispensed. Additionally, they should be aware of the parental role and responsibility that school systems have designed for them.

The parent of a child who is limited in English proficiency can take steps to become more involved in school by first asking key questions about the programs that the school offers, or should offer, for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. In Texas, this is a program of bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) instruction. Although bilingual and ESL programs have been part of the school curricula for a long time, there are still many misconceptions. It is crucial that parents receive clarification and guidance on these programs because, today, they are still very viable instructional approaches for helping their kids succeed in school.

Bilingual Education in Texas

Bilingual education is a program of instruction that uses a student's primary language as a tool for instruction while he or she begins learning English – the second language of the student. *Only students who have been identified as speaking little or no English are offered this special approach.* The program is meant to help the student for several years until it is determined that he or she can successfully handle academic work entirely in English. In addition to the teaching of subject matter in the primary language, the program provides English instruction using ESL teaching methods (Sosa, 1993). This special approach is referred to *transitional bilingual education*. It encompasses both bilingual instruction and ESL instruction. In Texas, bilingual education programs are Spanish-English programs since most LEP children are from a Spanish-speaking background.

Bilingual education or ESL programs are required by law in Texas for students who speak little or no English and who need help in learning English and school curricula that is in English. The Texas law was first enacted in *1975* by the Texas legislature. Under the latest education law which was passed in 1994, known as Senate Bill 1, these programs are still required.

The Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the State Board of Education, issues rules that guide the implementation of the law. These rules are entitled, Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students (Texas Education Agency, 1996). The rules outline in detail how bilingual education and ESL programs should be structured and carried out. Staff from the Texas Education Agency monitor school districts to ensure that they establish programs when needed and that the programs abide by the rules.

Parents play key roles in the education of their children. They play the role of

Top 10 Questions - *continued on page 13*

Sources of Information

Organizations

Cyber-Symposium Teachers College Columbia University
newlinks.tc.columbia.edu

Education Service Center
in your region. To locate call 512-463-9734, Texas Education Agency Information

NCBE
1-800-531-NCBE
www.ncbe.gwu.edu
(National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education)

STAR Center
1-888-FYI-STAR
www.starcenter.org
(The comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas (Federal Region 6). A collaboration of IDRA, the Dana Center at U.T. Austin, and RMC Research.)

TENET
www.tenet.edu
(Texas Education Network)

Publications

Hispanic Families as Valued Partners: An Educator's Guide
by M. Robledo Montecel, A. Gallagher, A. Montemayor, A. Villarreal, N. Adame-Reyna and J. Supik (90 Pages, 1993, $19.95).

"Keeping the Faith: Valuing Parents"
by A. Montemayor (*IDRA Newsletter*, September 1996, free)

"Parents as First Teachers: Creating an Enriched Home Learning Environment"
by A. Villarreal (*IDRA Newsletter*, April 1995, free)

"Parents Reclaiming Their Schools: New Initiative Brings Parents Together for Better Schools"
by A. Montemayor (*IDRA Newsletter*, June-July 1994, free)

Publications are available from IDRA, 210/684-8180, fax 210/684-5389, www.idra.org

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advisor by cooperating with the teachers in learning more about the children and in describing what the expectations for the children are. When teachers genuinely ask parents to play this role, they set the stage to establish a working relationship based on mutual respect and trust. A relationship based on trust and a genuine belief that parents are crucial in providing the best education for their children provides the backdrop for a successful educational experience.

The other major role that parents play is the *advocate* role where parents are vigilant to ensure that their children get the education that will prepare them to make those important choices when they graduate and that they have the academic and social skills to continue their education at the university level or to enter the workplace at the time of graduation. In either case, parents should see that the student was not tracked into one or the other and that the student had options. As an advocate for the best educational opportunities, parents must ensure that instructional programs are implemented the right way and that administrators and teachers guard the integrity of the programs.

At some key junctures, parents must ask questions about the quality and the integrity of the bilingual education program being implemented in the school. Parents must question the school's bilingual education program when enrolling their children in school. Furthermore, they must question the quality of the program if their children are not progressing satisfactorily academically. There is a need to question when students in bilingual education programs are not meeting state standards and consequently are staying behind other children in the acquisition of academic content.

In Texas, many children in Spanish-English bilingual education programs who are not ready to take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in English are taking the Spanish version and are scoring low even after four years of instruction in a bilingual education program. This is sufficient reason to start questioning the quality of the bilingual education program being implemented in the school. Ten key questions that parents must ask are discussed below.

Top 10 Questions for Parents About Bilingual Education

1. Does the school district have policies that support and value the contributions of bilingual education in the community?

2. Does the school value and support bilingual education as a most promising instructional program for children who are of limited English proficiency?

3. Is the bilingual education program given high status or at least seen as important as any other successful program in the school?

4. Is the bilingual education program given the necessary resources to function effectively?

5. Are all teachers aware of the principles and the research that support bilingual education?

6. Is the bilingual education instructional design based on currently recognized principles of bilingual education that are supported by research?

7. Are bilingual teachers implementing bilingual education as it should be implemented?

8. Is there an urgency to exit students from the bilingual education program with no regard for their readiness to transfer to an all English program?

9. Are bilingual teachers under tremendous pressure to produce LEP student success on the TAAS at the expense of other learning?

10. What criteria are being used by the school to ensure that children are placed in a quality instructional program, one that will cause children to achieve and excel?

1. Does the school district have policies that support and value the contributions of bilingual education in the community?

Policies passed by the school board and adhered to at the campus level are statements that support and lend credence to certain actions that must occur at the campus or classroom level. Policies are statements that support a philosophy about student learning and success. These policies become the voice of the school district and tell teachers and all school personnel how the school board thinks and expects the schools to act. Policies that cast a doubt about the value of bilingual education are usually interpreted at the school level as permission to do otherwise or to give little attention to the issue. Parents must examine these policies and push for the revision of policies to ensure quality educational opportunities for all children. Parents have a key responsibility as advocates for the rights of children to demand policies that support and value bilingual education, especially for the LEP student who is in need for this type of instruction.

2. Does the school value and support bilingual education as a most promising instructional program for children who are of limited English proficiency?

A school that communicates to its faculty and community that a certain program is suspect creates a hostile environment that dooms that program to failure before it is given a chance to succeed. Programs that face this predicament rarely succeed. Such is the case in many schools about bilingual education. This feeling stems from a perception about the children to be served by the program or a lack of understanding of the benefits of bilingual education. In some cases, it stems from school personnel's inability to implement a program that requires that they know two languages well to teach reading and writing and to do so in both languages.

Where bilingual education has been a success is in schools that share a common vision for the education of *all* children and who have high expectations about them. These are schools that adhere to the research findings that tell us that rushing bilingual children to learn English without first formalizing their dominance of the first

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language creates difficulties in acquiring the academic content and in learning English well to be successful in school at the secondary level.

Parents must make sure that schools have the basic knowledge about bilingual education and that their bilingual programs adhere to recent research findings. Parents should ask questions such as:

- What does the school do in order to make sure that all teachers know about bilingual education, not only the bilingual teachers?
- What are administrators doing about supporting and promoting bilingual education? What is the school doing to ensure that my children get the best education?

3. Is the bilingual education program given high status or at least seen as important as any other successful program in the school?

The status given to bilingual education by administrators and teachers in the campus will determine to a great extent the success of the program in meeting the needs of LEP children. Primary language instruction in Spanish helps in at least two ways. First, through Spanish the child can learn concepts and develop skills in the core "content areas," such as math, science and social studies while he or she is mastering the skills of English. Second, instruction in Spanish develops or improves the child's skills in this language. In many cases, children's competence in Spanish is only in the oral skills. Other children's Spanish skills may be latent, or hiding, in the subconscious because of lack of practice. Yet, these students identify with the language because, through it, they can stay connected to family and friends in the community. Staying connected is an important element in positive motivation and self-concept development, and these attitudes and feelings influence student learning in general.

4. Is the bilingual education program given the necessary resources to function effectively?

School districts are allocated additional funds for the resources needed to implement a quality bilingual education program. Many times these funds are not used as effectively as they could be to upgrade the quality of the bilingual education program. Many programs do not have the qualified teachers to implement the program, and the school district does not take the necessary steps to acquire these qualified teachers. There is no attempt to grow its own bilingual teachers in the community.

Parents should ask questions about the qualifications of the teachers, their commitment to preserve the integrity of the bilingual program and the opportunities in the school district to upgrade or refine the teachers' skills to address the needs of LEP students. Is this commitment with the bilingual education teachers or with teachers across the board?

5. Are all teachers aware of the principles and the research that support bilingual education?

Teachers have varying levels of preparation to become effective bilingual education teachers for our children. Teachers who have been in the field for several years need to be aware of new knowledge that is emerging through research and experience. At a minimum, teachers must adhere to a set of principles that are based on the most current research. For example, parents must ask questions that address these principles. Some of these questions are:

- Why is a *dual language program* a better approach to use in a bilingual setting?
- Why is the first language important in the instruction of LEP students?
- How do you show students that both languages are of equal value and importance in the instruction?
- How do you show the class that both cultures are important and have contributed to the welfare of this country?
- When do you bring parents into the decision-making process of the school?

6. Is the bilingual education instructional design based on currently recognized principles of bilingual education that are supported by research?

The bilingual education program rules calls for "structured" instruction in the two languages. This means that the amount of Spanish and English instruction for each student should be planned and should be based on the level of proficiency in the two languages. Students with no English skills could spend up to 90 percent of the time in Spanish instruction. Students who have intermediate level skills in English could spend as little as 10 percent of their instruction in the primary language. *Assessment information, in conjunction with the bilingual education philosophy adhered to by the campus, should be used to make decisions on the amount of primary language instruction that a child receives.*

Planning can help establish instruction for groups of students at similar levels, rather than having individualized instruction for each child. In ESL instruction, the commissioner's rules state that English instruction should be commensurate in time allotment with regular English instruction.

Students in bilingual education and ESL programs *must* be taught the same curricula as students in the regular, mainstream, program. In Texas, these curricula have been called the "Essential Elements." There are Essential Elements for each grade level, pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

In bilingual education programs, students learn the Essential Elements through Spanish and later transfer this knowledge to English. Bilingual teachers should be trained on how to transfer skills from one language to another. When done appropriately, the transfer of skills from Spanish to English occurs smoothly and quickly, especially in the elementary grades.

In ESL programs, instruction in the Essential Elements are delivered through specialized English methodology. ESL teachers should be trained in ESL methodology. When ESL instruction is done appropriately, students can learn the basics in the essential skills and knowledge of the content areas; these can be applied to more rigorous academic tasks as the students become ready.

7. Are bilingual teachers implementing bilingual education as it should be implemented?

Many schools will have well designed plans for the implementation of bilingual education programs. Administrators and teachers can articulate the principles of bilingual education and can talk about their commitment to all children. However, when we observe many bilingual education classrooms, we know right away that bilingual instruction is not happening and that teachers feel the pressure to exit students to English as soon as possible.

Parents should visit the classrooms and see if the teachers are giving equal value to both languages, see how often both languages are used for instruction, see how the teacher uses the children's experiences to base the instruction, and see if the teachers use both languages to assess children's knowledge.

8. Is there an urgency to exit students from

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the bilingual education program with no regard for their readiness to transfer to an all English program?

Texas requires that schools have a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) to determine and approve bilingual education offerings and exiting of students from the program. Many times these committees are faced with pressure, overtly or covertly expressed, from administrators and teachers to move students out of the program as soon as possible. Moving a student out of a bilingual education program prematurely will have adverse effects on the student's achievement. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see the urgency to get students out of the bilingual program with no support to provide for the adjustment to the transition experience.

Parents must not allow for schools to exit students prematurely from the bilingual education program. They should inquire about the exiting policies and the expertise that LPAC committee members have in bilingual education to make these extremely important decisions. They should require that training be provided to LPAC members periodically.

9. Are bilingual teachers under tremendous pressure to produce LEP student success on the TAAS at the expense of other learning?

Many teachers who are under tremendous pressure to exit students tend to shortchange the integrity of the program by overemphasizing the use of English at the expense of academic content that will be assessed in the TAAS test. There is a general feeling and a misconception that in order to be successful with the TAAS test, students have to take it in English. If students can be successful in passing the TAAS test in Spanish, they can transfer the knowledge once they have the necessary labels to comprehend text in English.

The instruction students receive in bilingual education and ESL should teach students the Essential Elements. The Essential Elements include objectives that are tested in the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). If teachers teach the Essential Elements and, at the same time, provide intensive and appropriate instruction in English, then students are being prepared for the TAAS.

However, students who are limited in English proficiency do need more time to learn skills tested in the TAAS. Because they are involved in learning language and content simultaneously, the learning process is slower for them. It should be remembered that, because the state expects LEP students to be taught the Essential Elements, school districts must provide bilingual education and ESL instruction that is accelerated rather than remedial. Some schools across the country have developed models of accelerated bilingual education and ESL instruction.

Parents must support teachers who are clamoring for permission to do what is right in a bilingual education program. Show your support by questioning schools that have as a goal the exiting of students by a specific grade. Some students are not ready. Question schools that have a high dropout

Top 10 Questions - continued on page 20

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IDRA ACTIVITIES

In September and October, IDRA worked with **7,481** teachers, administrators and parents through **112** training and technical assistance activities and **80** program sites in **eight** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

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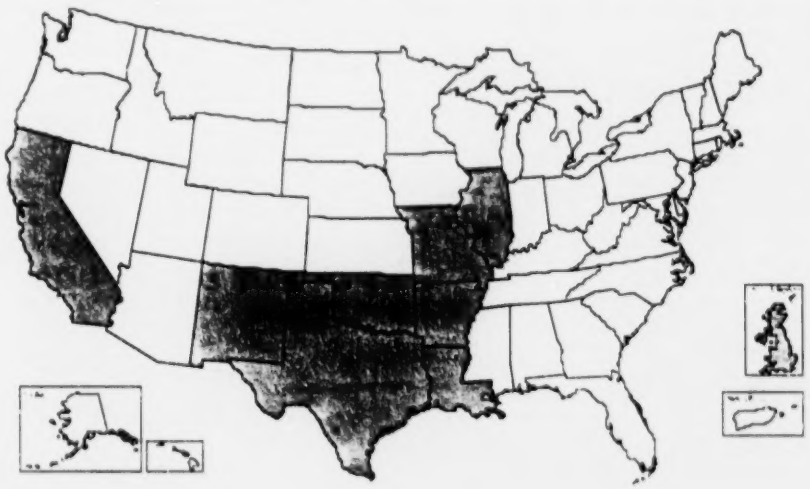
- Oral Language Development
- *Project FLAIR*
- Learning Styles
- U.S. Dept of Education IASA Regional Conference Evaluation
- Literature Based Instruction
- *Mobilization for Equity*



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ISSUE: USE OF PUBLIC MONEY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLING

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE: KEEPING THE FOCUS ON EQUITY

Ann Bastian

Being asked to write an article against school choice is a bit like being asked to burn the American flag at a VFW meeting. You have every right to do it, but do you want to? After all, choice is a bedrock American value. Applied to schools, it sounds great: Students and parents get to choose, deserving schools get chosen.

But what if this is not the reality of school choice? In reality, school choice means very different things in different contexts. From the many versions of choice, we can construct three broad categories.

First, there are choice programs within a single public school district. These local, "controlled choice" plans seek to expand educational options.

Second, there are interdistrict and statewide public school plans. These seek to establish a public marketplace of schools through competition for enrollment.

Third, there are voucher plans that include private schools. These seek to create an unrestricted marketplace of competing public, private and parochial schools.

Much of the debate over school choice has focused on vouchers. It was, after all, the key educational platform of the Republican Party. Vouchers deserve the most critical scrutiny as a threat to public education. But we should also look closely at the problems and potentials of choice programs that are strictly within the public schools.

UNLESS OUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY INCLUDES ALL SCHOOLS, WE ARE BUILDING MORE LIFEBOATS, NOT BETTER SHIPS.

The most promising examples of choice have occurred in the first category, within single public school districts. The programs most often cited are East Harlem in New York City, Montclair, New Jersey and Cambridge, Massachusetts. These programs, while not perfect, suggest several important features of a good choice model:

- Choice is just one element in a comprehensive reform strategy.
- Every school in the district has become a school of choice.
- School missions are diverse but have been developed in complementary rather than competitive ways.
- Teachers are given the time, training and power to shape the school mission; parents also have a strong voice.
- Transportation costs are covered by the district.
- Parents and students are given enough information to make informed choices.
- Districts have secured significantly higher funding to sustain school improvement.

We should be fully aware, however, that even within a single public school district, controlled choice is no miracle cure for education. Where it works, it is one tool among others, and it only works well when there is a prior and steadfast commitment to equity, adequate funding and internal school restructuring.

Creating Islands of Excellence?

School districts should be particularly cautious about choice programs that improve only a limited number of schools. This is often the case in "magnet" programs where students apply to "specialty" schools to go around, choice is more likely to create islands of excellence (or adequacy) than it is to stimulate improvement across the board.*

When the good choices are limited, we see choice schools creaming off the most academically qualified students. Choice

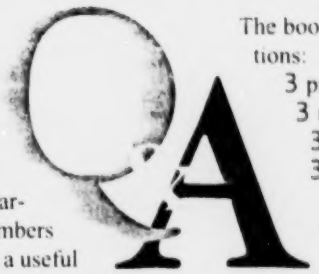
***Public School Choice** - continued on page 17*

IDRA PUBLICATION AVAILABLE...

Questions and Answers about Bilingual Education

by Dr. Alicia Salinas Sosa

Even after 26 years of federal funding for bilingual education, questions continue to surface about this educational program. *Questions and Answers about Bilingual Education* identifies the 23 most frequently asked questions and provides brief but complete answers to clarify misconceptions and misunderstandings held by non-educators such as parents, community board members and school board members regarding bilingual education and its goals. It is also a useful resource for educators, such as principals and assistant superintendents, who may not have had formal training in bilingual education.



The book is divided into four easy to follow sections:

3 program questions,
3 rationale questions,
3 implementation questions,
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This publication is designed to clarify the benefits to be derived from a quality bilingual education program and to empower the reader to assist other educators and members of the community.

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Public School Choice *- continued from page 16*

becomes another form of tracking. Studies also show that the parents who utilize limited choice systems, even within poor districts, are likely to be more active, more educated, and financially better off. This only adds another dimension to the parental advantage that controls educational opportunity for most children. At the same time, parents gravitate toward schools that reflect their own racial and cultural background, so that limited choice offerings have not lessened school segregation.

The results become very stark when we look at America's urban high school systems, where flagship academic magnets serving middle school students contrast with desperately deprived neighborhood high schools for the working class, the poor and communities of color.

The same problems are posed by charter schools, which are intended to be unique, exempt from bureaucratic mandates and operated under special contract with school districts. Like magnets, charter schools are promoted as models for innovations. The problem is that if charter schools don't embrace the highest standards of equity in the students they enroll and retain, they too become another way to layer and segregate the choices in a school system. Given the current conditions of fiscal crisis and polarized resources facing most districts, charter schools can easily end up as isolated refuges for the adamant, the lucky, and by design, the privileged.

Unless our commitment to quality includes all schools, we are building more lifeboats, not better ships. The challenges for school choice are compounded in the second category, which includes interdistrict and statewide public school choice. In this marketplace model, every public school competes for enrollments, on the premise that enrollment dollars are sufficient incentives for school innovation and improvement and that competition will reward the best. Eleven states have implemented varieties of statewide public school choice.

The data thus far are sketchy, except for the fact that nowhere has interdistrict choice ignited a revolution of school restructuring, parent engagement and educational improvement as its proponents originally claimed. None of the statewide choice plans have included significant new resources for multiplying better schools or helping those at the bottom. Moreover, few states subsidize transportation costs for interdistrict transportation costs for interdistrict transfers, ensuring that the class barriers to choice remain high and that outcomes remain skewed.

Overall, studies show that only a small number of parents opt for choice in statewide open enrollment programs. Data from four statewide plans (Minnesota, Massachusetts, Arkansas and Arizona) indicate that choice participants are disproportionately White and affluent. Again, parental advantage seems decisive.

Dangers of Marketplace Models

The limits of the marketplace models of choice are becoming clearer. The past decade of experience points to three central dangers:

- **Widening the gap between education "haves" and "have-nots."** Instead of becoming a tool for reform, this choice model rationalizes and accelerates inequity. It allows already advantaged schools to cream students and resources from other districts, leaving poorer schools and their students further depleted.
- **Weakening the link between schools and local communities.** In a large-scale marketplace model, schools are no longer bound by geographical or political communities. Schools and students would become even more removed from their neighborhoods. Community control of schooling would be further eroded, making it even harder for communities of color and people who are poor to fight for equity and reform. Taxpayers, voters, relatives and citizens would feel even less invested in education.
- **Promoting the marketing of schools.** Where schools are competing for premium enrollments, the ability to attract students would depend as much on their ability to advertise as their capacity to educate. The obvious temptation would be for schools to rely even more heavily on standardized test scores and test-driven instruction, the "steroids approach" to performance enhancement.

The debate over school choice will be with us for a long time, even if voucher plans and private school choice options are soundly defeated. In weighing the problems and potentials, we need to keep in mind the most basic and practical question for any choice program: Does it fix what's really wrong?

There is nothing inherent in school choice that deals with key issues such as smaller class and school size, teacher training, multicultural curricula, teacher-parent collaboration, youth services, or equal and adequate funding. Moreover, choice is deflecting attention from such key issues.

Nowhere have limited or selective choice schools been found to promote restructuring in schools across the system. A national study by the Carnegie Foundation concurs with the conclusions drawn in a recent review of choice and voucher programs by the Harvard School Choice Project: "It seems unlikely that choice by itself will stimulate creativity and improvement in the development of new, more effective educational programs."

The hard reality is that there is no short cut to building good schools. Like parenting children, educating children is based on human relationships, the quality of which depends very much on the support systems surrounding the family and school. We have public education because we need a community and government support system to sustain this enormous undertaking, to make an unconditional investment in every child, to invest in the future as well as the present, to serve both individuals and communities.

School enrollments are not chips to be brokered in a marketplace, public or private. Even in our post-industrial consumer society, some choices are not about buying and selling.

Resources

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Ann Bastian is a senior program officer at the New World Foundation, an education policy consultant and a history teacher. This article is reprinted with the permission from Selling Out Our Schools *by Rethinking Schools.*

** IDRA's work in school desegregation and magnet schools confirms that magnet schools are not islands of excellence when they are part of a district-wide comprehensive strategy. IDRA's study,* Magnet Schools: Pockets of Excellence in a Sea of Diversity *by Bradley Scott and Anna DeLuna (1995) provides indicators of effectiveness that include magnet schools in collaboration with non-magnet schools in a given district by sharing resources, staff development and programs.*

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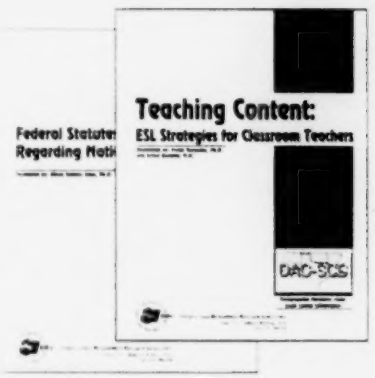
DESEGREGATION ASSISTANCE MODULES AVAILABLE

Teaching Content: ESL Strategies for Classroom Teachers

by Frank Gonzales, Ph.D.



This training module is designed for trainers to assist classroom teachers to modify their teaching strategies to meet the needs of language-minority students. Use this tool to familiarize participants with the linguistic and cognitive needs of language-minority students in the content area classroom. Help teachers acquire strategies that allow language-minority students to participate successfully in the content area classroom. Participants can also experience science, mathematics and social studies hands-on activities that incorporate strategies appropriate for language-minority students. This 53-page module comes with session outlines, a pre/post test, and handout and transparency masters. (ISBN 1-878550-56-X; 1995 Revised)

Federal Statutes and Directives Regarding National Origin Students

by Frank Gonzales, Ph.D.

This technical assistance module for trainers concentrates on familiarizing participants with the legal aspects of providing services to limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. Use this module to familiarize participants with the demographic changes occurring in the United States and with the federal requirements concerning LEP students. Participants will also become familiar with procedures necessary to ensure the rights of LEP students and will apply this information to their campus, district, etc. This 49-page module comes with session outlines, a pre/post test, handout and transparency masters, and background readings. (ISBN 1-878550-61-6; 1996 Revised)

Each module is $8.50 and is available from IDRA at 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190; 210/684-8180; fax 210/684-5389; E-mail: cgoodman@idra.org.

Berlin Walls *- continued from age 11*

of democratic citizenship a priority in our lives.

Second, our churches, synagogues and mosques, our social and professional clubs, and our recreational leagues are a few examples of the kinds of civic organizations in which Americans have historically participated. They constitute the informal infrastructure that makes our communities work. These are important places where people from all parts of a community come together, defining community priorities and finding ways to demonstrate leadership. We need to encourage citizen participation in these organizations and others like them.

Third, we need to create "safe" places or opportunities where people from all parts of a community can come together and talk about our differences, our concerns, our hopes and dreams. There are a variety of ways of doing so. One place that comes to mind from the Mott Foundations's many years of funding education is the school. Our experience tells us that our schools are probably the single most important institution to the future of every American community. I believe we have the best chance of coming together by realizing the power and potential of school-community partnerships.

In the final analysis, all of these things are about bringing people together – about connectedness. But we must renew both our respect for each other's differences and our sense of common purpose. A change so fundamental must take root where all changes in attitude have their beginnings – in each individual conscience. If we are really committed to building a better society for future generations, the time to change is now. I think the interviews that follow in these pages offer a place, perhaps, to begin.

Let me end my comments at that most infamous wall of our time.

Thanks to the events of recent years, the Berlin Wall now symbolizes more than division. By crumbling, it almost miraculously has become a symbol of unity, persistence and courage. I am in awe of the people who remained faithful to the idea that one day the wall would be torn down – that their children would dance with joy as it disintegrated. That day came at last.

Such a day can come to America – a day when we stand reunited, proud of our separate identities, respectful of our differences, but reinvigorated by the knowledge that we can and must share a common home.

Reprinted with permission from America's Tattered Tapestry: Can We Reclaim Our Civility Through Connectedness? *1995 Annual Report of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.*

Public Engagement *- continued from page 1*

disseminate information to other interested people on the Gallegly amendment and the unconstitutionality of the proposal (Cortez, 1996).

A broad range of other interest groups was also actively involved in the public debate on the issue. These included educator associations such as National Education Association (NEA), National Association of School Administrators (NASA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CSSO) which is the national organization of state superintendents and commissioners, and law enforcement groups concerned with large numbers of school-age youth "wandering the streets" with no place to go during the school day and denied admission to school.

Despite this broad range of opposition, the Gallegly amendment was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 257 to 163 (12 members not voting) (*Congressional Record*, 1996).

The senate version of the immigration legislation did not include the Gallegly measure. A conference committee was appointed to work out this and other differences in the two versions. Once a new version was created, both the House of Representatives and the Senate would have to vote to accept the changes before the bill would be sent to President Clinton.

In the Senate, many members had heard their constituents' objections during the August recess and expressed serious reservations about denying children access to education, calling it a misguided way of attempting to control immigration. At one point during the conference committee deliberations, the conferees received a letter signed by 47 senators indicating that the senators would not support an immigration reform measure that denied education to immigrant children.

The president also communicated his grave concerns with the Gallegly provisions and stated that he would veto any measure that included denial of education to children.

Attempted Compromises

Faced with strong Senate opposition, proponents of the Gallegly amendment attempted to develop "compromises" that would make the measure palatable to enough members of the senate to win approval. One such compromise provided for grandfathering, or excluding children of undocumented workers who are already enrolled in schools. Another called for allowing such students to attend elementary schools but would require children to pay full tuition to attend high school. None of the variations on the original proposal produced sufficient changes of position by senators.

As opposition to the immigrant reform measure grew because of the Gallegly provisions, proponents of some of the broader reforms began to take issue with the student exclusion provisions. They complained that it was endangering passage of the broader bill and eventually eliminated the contentious education exclusion clauses from the final legislation.

Undeterred, Gallegly supporters won a concession to be allowed the opportunity to introduce the amendment as a separate bill before the end of the 104th Congress. The Gallegly measure was introduced, but not adopted, in the final days of the recently completed congressional session.

Other measures, some even more exclusionary, were introduced this year. Yet they did not receive the same high level of attention as did the Gallegly measure and were not passed by Congress.

What It All Means

These latest attempts to deny children of undocumented workers access to public schools is a continuation of efforts by organized groups that include California-based anti-immigrant factions and immigration reform proponents from around the country. While the latest attempt was defeated, it is likely that there will be future attempts to deny education to children of undocumented workers in national legislative proposals, and possibly in state-focused legislation.

Children's advocates did not stand on the sidelines during the crucial congressional debates this year, and they made a difference in the defeat of the proposals. The general public began to understand that these proposals were more about excluding children from education than they were about reducing illegal immigration and saving taxpayer money. Individuals across the country voiced their disdain for such exclusion.

Since we will likely see similar proposals again and again, it would behoove us to deal with the larger issue. We must continue to create understanding among the general public about the issues at stake. We must dispel the many misconceptions surrounding the "rationale" offered by proponents of exclusion. The truth is that:

WE MUST CONTINUE TO CREATE UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT THE ISSUES AT STAKE. WE MUST DISPEL THE MANY MISCONCEPTIONS SURROUNDING THE "RATIONALE" OFFERED BY PROPONENTS OF EXCLUSION.

- There is no research data supporting the concept that denying children access to education will have any impact on immigration.
- Denial of a basic education punishes children for situations that they do not control.
- Research has shown that the majority of children of undocumented workers end up settling in the United States as adults, making access to education a critical long-term issue.
- The savings that some say are realized by keeping immigrant pupils out of school, when distributed among those currently enrolled, comes to a mere few dollars per school year and pennies per school day for each student. Funding issues attributed to immigrant pupil enrollment are often really a reflection of fundamental flaws in systems of state education funding.

Had the individuals and groups not staged organized and informed objections to the latest attack on immigrant children's educational opportunities, it is conceivable that the restrictive proposals would have prevailed. If we allow legislators to deny access to education for some, then we take a step closer to allowing legislators to deny or dilute equity of access for any others perceived as different or "undeserving." If any child is subject to injustice, we are all the poorer for it.

Resources

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Albert Cortez is the division director of the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership. Anna Alicia Romero is an education assistant in the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership.

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Top 10 Questions *- continued from page 15*

rate of students who are limited English proficient.

10. What criteria are being used by the school to ensure that children are placed in a quality instructional program, one that will cause children to achieve and excel?

The state law and rules for educating LEP students indicate that parents have the right to information and to decision-making, and they specify how parents need to be informed and involved. Specifically, the parent(s) of every child who qualifies for the program must receive information about the program features and benefits. Then, most importantly, the parent(s) must provide consent in writing for the student's participation in the program.

Once the child is in the program, parents must receive information on the child's assessment and progress, program placement changes, and completion of the program (exiting). Parents also, must be part of the district's Language Proficiency Assessment Committees. So, one thing parents can do is to become more familiar with Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students and other information about bilingual education from the state – as well as other sources.

The 10 questions discussed in this article are among the key questions that parents may ask schools when they are not convinced that their bilingual programs are producing the results in achievement that will provide the LEP students the same opportunities to make those choices that make a difference for people. It is not an all-inclusive list. Parents become a vigorous force and a catalyst for positive educational changes. It is when we exercise these roles that we show the schools and our children that we are real partners in the educational process, not mere bystanders waiting to be asked. School personnel working with parents often find it helpful to review these questions with parents of LEP students.

In Spanish there are two proverbs, in particular, that should remind us of our responsibility to the school and to our children. These proverbs are: "*No hay pero lucha, que la que no se hace*" [There is no worse struggle than the one that is never undertaken (Ballesteros, 1979)] and "*El que poco pide, nada merece*" [The person who asks for little deserves nothing (Ballesteros, 1979)].

Resources

Ballesteros, O.A. *Mexican Proverbs: The Philosophy, Wisdom and Humor of a People.* (Burnet, Texas: Eakin Press, 1979).

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Sosa, Alicia S. *Questions and Answers About Bilingual Education* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1993).

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